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A spark of hope: Cleveland researchers discover potential path to reversing Alzheimer's

For over a century, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease has been widely regarded by the medical community and families alike as an irreversible, one-way street. However, a groundbreaking study published in late December 2025 by a collaborative team in Cleveland is challenging that long-held dogma, offering the first tangible "proof of principle" that the brain's decline might not be permanent.

Researchers from Case Western Reserve University, University Hospitals, and the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center have identified a critical biological failure at the heart of the disease: a dramatic drop in a cellular energy molecule known as NAD+. By restoring the balance of this molecule using an experimental drug, the team successfully reversed advanced Alzheimer's pathology and fully restored cognitive function in animal models.

The energy crisis in the brain

The study, led by Dr. Kalyani Chaubey and senior author Dr. Andrew Pieper, reveals that while NAD+ levels naturally decline as



Britain's Prince William, Prince of Wales listens to a scientist during a visit to Isambard-AI, the UK's most powerful supercomputer, who are exploring how the supercomputer can help develop new drugs to combat heart disease and Alzheimer's as well as predicting extreme weather, during a visit to the University of Bristol in the city of Bristol, south-west England, on January 22, 2026.

we age, this depletion is significantly more severe in brains afflicted by Alzheimer's. NAD+ acts as a "metabolic currency," essential for DNA repair and maintaining the energy balance required for neurons to survive. "When NAD+ falls below necessary lev-

els, cells cannot effectively perform essential maintenance and survival functions," Dr. Pieper explained. This energy failure makes the brain vulnerable to the toxic buildup of amyloid plaques and tau tangles, the hallmark "corrosion" of the disease.

From prevention to recovery

In experiments utilizing two distinct mouse modelsone mimicking amyloid issues and the other focusing on tau protein the researchers introduced a compound called P7C3-A20. Unlike standard over-the-counter

supplements that can push NAD+ to potentially unsafe levels, this pharmacological agent helps cells maintain a healthy balance under stress without driving them into dangerous territory.

The results were described as "striking" by the team. Not only did the treatment block the onset of the disease in younger mice, but it also repaired structural damage and fully restored memory and learning in mice with advanced conditions. Notably, this recovery occurred even without directly targeting the amyloid plaques that most current drugs focus on.

Cautious optimism for the future

While the scientific community is heralded this as a "big step forward," experts urge cautious optimism. Because the results have currently only been observed in animal models, they do not yet guarantee the same outcome for human patients.

"Alzheimer's is a complex, multifactorial, uniquely human disease," noted Dr. Pieper, emphasizing that human clinical trials are the critical next step. □

North Carolina lodges and ministries honor heroes with "spirit of service" vvents

WHITEVILLE, NC – As spring begins to bloom across the Tar Heel State, a wave of community-led gratitude is sweeping through North Carolina's small towns. This March, local Masonic lodges and food ministries are setting the table for those who serve, launching a series of "Spirit of Service" events designed to honor veterans and first responders through fellowship and the humble comfort of a pancake breakfast.

The movement reached a peak this past weekend as three regional lodges Lebanon Lodge #207 of Chadbourn, Chadbourn Lodge #190, and Tabor Lodge #593 joined forces



for a massive community breakfast at 124 Pecan Street in Whiteville. The event, which organizers described as a "morning of appreciation," saw hundreds of local veterans, law enforcement officers, and EMS personnel gather with their families to share a meal provided at no cost to the honored guests.

A foundation of gratitude

"These men and women protect our communities every day, often without a 'thank you,'" said one event organizer from Lebanon Lodge. "We wanted to create a family-friendly space where they can feel the genuine gratitude of the neighbors they serve."

The initiative reflects a broader trend of "Spirit of Service" activities across the state. In Franklin, the Holly Springs community hosted its own Easter-themed pancake breakfast on March 21 at the Cat Creek Road community building, with proceeds dedicated to local infrastructure projects including a community well. Meanwhile, in Harnett County, veterans gathered for a specialized resource breakfast on March 23, where local officials like Assistant Veterans Services Director Amy Noel worked to connect former service members with essential medical and burial benefits.

Addressing the need for support

The celebratory breakfasts come at a time of increased focus on the well-being of North Carolina's heroes. Recently, the Second Annual First Responder Mental Health and Wellness Summit in Buncombe County brought together firefighters and EMTs to break the stigma surrounding the emotional toll of their work. Programs like these, paired with grassroots events, are building a robust support network that "meets veterans where they are," as noted by N.C. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Secretary Jocelyn Mitnaul Mallette. □

Travis Kelce transforms \$3.3m mansion into sanctuary for former foster youth

KANSAS CITY – In the high-stakes world of professional football, success is often measured by rings, records, and real estate. But for Kansas City Chiefs star tight end Travis Kelce, his latest “big play” isn’t happening on the turf of GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium. Instead, it is unfolding within the walls of a \$3.3 million mansion that has been reimagined not as a celebrity bachelor pad, but as a beacon of hope for young adults who have spent their lives searching for a place to belong.

This month, Kelce officially handed over the keys of his sprawling suburban estate to Foster Love, a national nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of children in the foster care system. The initiative aims to solve one of the most heartbreaking “cliffs” in the American social safety net: the moment a foster child turns 18 and is suddenly expected to navigate the world alone.

The “aged out” crisis

Every year, roughly 20,000 young people “age out” of the U.S. foster care system. Without the traditional safety net of a family, many find themselves homeless, unemployed, or incarcerated



Travis Kelce of the Kansas City Chiefs waves to the crowd prior to the WM Phoenix Open 2026 at TPC Scottsdale on February 4, 2026 in Scottsdale, Arizona.

within mere months of their 18th birthday. In Missouri and Kansas, the statistics are equally sobering, with local advocates long calling for “transitional housing” that offers more than just a bed.

“When you turn 18, the world doesn’t just give you a manual on how to be an adult,” Kelce said during a small ribbon-cutting ceremony. “I’ve been blessed with a massive support system my whole life. Seeing these kids go through the hardest parts of life with-

out that same team behind them... it just didn’t sit right with me. We wanted to give them a home that feels like a home, not a facility.”

A mansion with a mission

The property, located in an upscale enclave of Kansas City, features over 10,000 square feet of living space. While it once boasted the amenities of a world-class athlete including a luxury pool, a chef’s kitchen, and expansive entertainment wings it has been thought-

fully renovated to serve its new residents.

The mansion will now house up to a dozen young adults, aged 18 to 24. Each resident will have their own private suite, providing the dignity and privacy many have lacked while moving between group homes. However, the true “magic” of the house lies in its common areas. The professional-grade kitchen will host weekly life-skills workshops where residents learn meal

planning and nutrition. The home theater has been converted into a study hall and tech center for those pursuing GEDs or college degrees, and the expansive grounds will be used for community gatherings and mentorship events.

More than just four walls

The partnership with Foster Love ensures that the mansion is staffed with specialized caseworkers and mentors who provide 24/7 support. Residents aren’t just given a room; they are enrolled in a comprehensive “launch” program. This includes financial literacy training, career counseling, and perhaps most importantly mental health resources to help process the trauma often associated with the foster care experience.

“Travis isn’t just writing a check,” said Gianna Dahlia, Executive Director of Foster Love. “By giving up this specific property, he’s sending a message to these young people: ‘You are worthy of luxury. You are worthy of a beautiful environment. You are worthy of the best we have to offer.’ That shift in mindset is where healing begins.” □

NASA says ‘on track’ for Artemis 2 launch as soon as April 1

Cape Canaveral, United States

NASA said Thursday that the long-delayed launch of Artemis 2, the first crewed flyby mission to the Moon in more than 50 years, could come as soon as April 1.

“We are on track for a launch as early as April 1, and we are working toward that date,” Lori Glaze, a senior NASA official, told a press conference, after technical difficulties delayed a launch originally expected in February. “It’s a test flight, and it is not without risk, but our team and our hardware are ready,” she said. “Just keep in mind we still have work” to do.

The US space agency announced in February a sudden revamp of the Artemis program, including the addition of a test mission before an eventual lunar landing.

The first launch window would be Wednesday, April 1, at 6:24 pm (2224 GMT), with several others available in the following days.

“We would anticipate on the order of about four opportunities within that six-day period,” Glaze said. The Artemis 2 mission is meant to be the first flyby of the Moon in more than half a century.

The rocket will be crewed by three American astronauts mission commander

Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch and Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen.

After launch, NASA diagrams indicate Artemis 2 will circumnavigate Earth before leaving orbit to travel to the Moon, without landing, for a lunar flyby before returning to Earth and splashing down in the ocean.

“Exactly how close the Artemis II crew will fly to the Moon will depend on when they launch,” ranging from 4,000 to 6,000 miles (6,437 to 9,656 km) above the lunar surface, because the Moon will “be in a different spot for each of the possible launch dates.”

The first Artemis flew much closer to the Moon 80 miles above the surface but NASA said Artemis 2 will

still go “tens of thousands of miles closer than any human has been in more than 50 years.” □

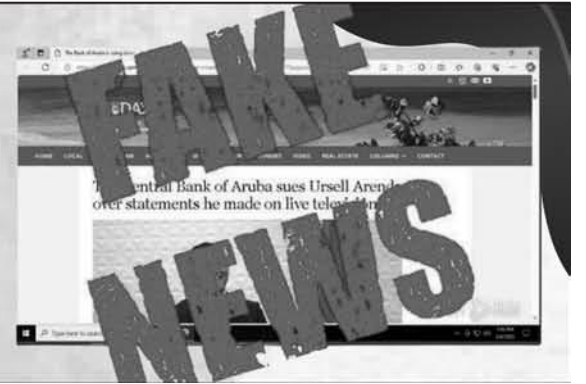


Lori Glaze, acting associate administrator, Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate looks on as John Honeycutt, the Artemis II Mission Management Team chair speaks about the flight readiness review of the Artemis II rocket components at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on March 12, 2026.

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A man wears a lobster hat that represent the OpenClaw logo, an open-source AI assistant at the Baidu headquarter in Beijing on March 11, 2026.

Nvidia rides 'claw' craze with AI agent platform

San José, United States

Nvidia announced Monday that it was joining the OpenClaw craze, unveiling tools to bring AI agents which can manage your email, files and calendar while you sleep into the corporate world.

OpenClaw has taken Silicon Valley and tech-savvy users across the globe by storm, sparking "lobster fever" in reference to its red crustacean mascot, with many of the biggest names in tech convinced the AI agent is redefining computing.

But security concerns have dogged its rise, prompting the Chinese government to block state enterprises from using the tool. Nvidia is betting it can address those fears.

"Mac and Windows are the operating systems for the personal computer. OpenClaw is the operating system for personal AI," Nvidia's chief executive Jensen Huang said in a statement.

"This is the moment the industry has been waiting for the beginning of a new renaissance in software," he added.

The chipmaker unveiled tools designed to add security and privacy controls to these AI agents, called "claws," that run directly on a person's computer and execute complex tasks without constant human oversight.

- Stunning success -

Unlike ChatGPT or other chatbots that simply answer questions, claws act independently and around the clock and can even be asked to create apps or programs from scratch.

The craze traces back to a weekend coding project by Austrian developer Peter Steinberger, who has since been hired by OpenAI.

In late 2025 he released a self-hosted AI assistant called Clawdbot -- a nod to Anthropic's Claude chatbot that could be mes-

saged through WhatsApp or Telegram and would quietly get to work on tasks in the background.

The response was immediate and overwhelming, with developers reporting they had stayed up all night finding new ways to exploit the tool, which can also be asked to write standalone software programs from simple text prompts.

After Anthropic filed a trademark infringement complaint, Steinberger renamed the project twice in quick succession, landing on OpenClaw.

The rebranding chaos generated only more headlines, and within months it had become the fastest-adopted open-source project in history.

But the technology's explosive spread has alarmed security researchers and corporate IT departments wary of employees inadvertently exposing company systems to hackers or causing disruption. □



U.S. musician and tech entrepreneur Will.i.am stands for a photo in front of Trinity, an electric, AI-powered three-wheeled vehicle during NVIDIA's annual GTC developers conference in San Jose, California, on March 17, 2026.

Music popstar will.i.am meshes AI and 'micromobility'

San José, United States

Black Eyed Peas star will.i.am is putting artificial intelligence agents to work in three-wheel vehicles tailored for modern urban life.

The musician turned tech entrepreneur demonstrated a so-called autocycle called Trinity at Nvidia's annual developers conference that ends Thursday in the heart of Silicon Valley.

"I'm an artistic creator because of tech," will.i.am told AFP.

"Creating with musical teams is great, but hopping into a different realm and being hyper creative with full-stack developers, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, world builders -- that is the ultimate level of creativity."

His Trinity startup is named for an alignment of human, vehicle and agentic AI.

The single-passenger electric vehicle, which shares its name with the startup, lets a human do the driving but is infused with an AI agent that acts as a virtual assistant for conversation-based collaborations on the move, he will.i.am said.

"When a human has an agent of their own, a company has a super employee," he said of brainstorming and delegating tasks to Trinity AI agents conversationally while commuting.

"Their vehicle that got them to work is a part of their tool set; and it's working in the parking lot while they work," he added, referring to Trinity as "brains on wheels."

The vehicle, designed to accelerate quickly from zero to 60 mph (96 kmh), uses an Nvidia graphics processor to power built-in AI that can interpret and reason about the world around it, according to the startup.

The vehicles are to be made in a Los Angeles facility that will also serve as a school for robotics and agentic AI systems. □

'Hope and fear': Iranians celebrate new year under shadow of war



Mohammad Reza Mousavi, an Iranian journalist who has been living in the United States for three years, sits beside a Haft-Sin table, an arrangement of seven symbolic items which names start with the letter "S", as he marks Nowruz, the Persian New Year, in Washington, DC, on March 18, 2026.

Paris, France

Sarvanaz remembers celebrating Iranian new year as a girl under the bombs of the Iran-Iraq war. As Tehran is again shaken by explosions, she said marking the Nowruz festival has again taken on new meaning.

"For me, it's an obligation of being Iranian, it's our root, it's not just celebrating springtime and rebirth of the earth," the 45-year-old told AFP from Paris, where she lives now. "For me it's resistance."

The ancient holiday is celebrated in Iran and neighbouring countries on the equinox in March, typically marked by weeks of anticipation as families prepare

Haft-Seen tables -- a symbolic arrangement of foods and objects, including apples, sprouted greens, painted eggs and poetry. This year Sarvanaz, who asked to only use her first name for security, decorated her egg with a blue sky and a sun.

"For me it's peace, it's a sky with no bombs and always shining."

Iranians inside the country and around the world are marking the Nowruz holiday on Friday under the shadow of the US-Israeli war with Iran that has sent shockwaves around the world.

But while the conflict has made marking the nor-

mally joyful festival of spring and the new year painful for some, many told AFP it felt even more important to celebrate under the circumstances.

Sarvanaz's parents in Iran will also celebrate, she said, though she may not be able to be in touch with them as usual due to the near-total communications blackout since the war started.

In Tehran in the days before the holiday, there was a sense of normalcy with shops open and streets again full of traffic, but there was little of the usual celebratory atmosphere, AFP reporters there said.

While many may forgo the

usual travel or gatherings this year, others in Iran said they would still celebrate.

Hoda, who lives in Saveh, south of Tehran, said she would "definitely gather with family" and even travel to the capital, which has seen some of the worst of the war's strikes.

"We assume and hope that there will be no attacks on the first day of the new year," she told an AFP reporter based outside Iran. But others left the country seeking reprieve.

A Kurdish resident of Mahabad in Iran's West Azerbaijan province, said her family travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan to celebrate, making part of the roughly 170-kilometre (100-mile) journey to Erbil on foot through the mountains because the borders have been closed.

"We were determined to come here because, in Iran, I felt that the Nowruz atmosphere just wasn't what it should be," she said. "The Kurds of Iraq are much more accustomed than we, the Kurds of Iran, to war and to the idea of celebrating even during times of conflict."

- 'Hard to be far away' -

For Kiarash in Germany, the holiday has been darkened by the war and the death of thousands in anti-government protests in Iran during which he saw people killed.

"Last year was with hope, this year is with hope and fear," he said.

"I invited many friends of mine to come here, because during these traumas, we have to sit together and talk, and prepare ourselves for something better."

In a corner of north London known as "Little Tehran", Shahabi, a baker, said the war shouldn't steal the Nowruz spirit.

"We've got to celebrate. I mean, this is the culture. We've been doing it for thousands of years. So we have to look for a brighter future," Shahabi told AFP.

Butcher Ali Nasiri, 48, said most Iranians around the world "don't feel like celebrating".

"But just to keep this tradition alive, we're celebrating. We're all celebrating, but we're all thinking of the people lost," he said.

Sasha Khoshabeh, a 44-year-old physical therapist living in Los Angeles where there is a large Iranian community, said he would usually call his friends and family in Iran on Nowruz to wish them good health.

But this year, "we don't even know if they're safe... what I wish for them is just to stay alive, to stay away from crowded places and to watch out for each other. And hopefully we can all celebrate a free Iran soon," he said.

Like Khoshabeh, Mahnaz Panjehpour in Paris, is feeling the distance from Iran starkly this year. □

Wild possum shelters with plush toys in Australian airport shop

Sydney, Australia

A wild possum joined stuffed furry friends in an Australian airport gift shop this week, surprising travellers in an adorable case of hide and squeak.

Staff at Hobart Airport in Australia's Tasmania state said the disoriented marsupial was spotted among the stuffed toys on Wednesday.

Video showed the critter nervously perched on a shelf, seamlessly blending in with the toy kangaroos and bears.

"We always knew our plushie toy collection was lifelike, but it seems we finally got

the ultimate seal of approval," store manager Liam Bloomfield said.

"We were very happy to see a special local visitor stop by our terminal gift shop to browse the toy aisle and see if it could find some new friends."

"We're just glad we could provide a cozy resting spot in our store," he added. Airport employees were quickly on-hand to return the animal to its rightful place in the great outdoors.

"Only in Australia and only at Hobart Airport could a local possum pop in for a quick browse among the souvenirs," an airport spokesperson said. □



This handout frame grab from UGC video footage by Melissa Oddie taken on March 18, 2026 and received via AFPTV shows a wild possum on a shelf among toys at Hobart Airport in Tasmania.

Mysterious ancient skeletons discovered sitting upright in France

Dijon, France

Children at a primary school in eastern France found a strange new attraction next to their playground this week: a skeleton sitting upright, peeking out the top of a circular pit. It is just the latest in a series of bodies discovered in the city of Dijon that were mysteriously buried in a seated position while facing west. Scientists are trying to work out why the ancient and little-understood Gaul people chose to bury some of its dead in this unusual manner and whether the men were still alive at the time.

The latest skeleton, which is remarkably well-preserved, was found next to the Josephine Baker primary school in the heart of Dijon.

Similar to four others unearthed nearby earlier this month, it is sitting upright at the bottom of a one-metre-wide pit.

The skeleton's hands are resting in its lap. Like the others, its back is against the eastern wall, its gaze directed westward.

Last year, 13 other Gallic skeletons were discovered around 20 metres away at the same construction site. The bodies are believed to date from around 300 to 200 BC.

Over the last three decades, archaeological digs have revealed that Dijon was once a special place for the Gauls, an enigmatic



This photograph taken on March 17, 2026 shows an archeological dig site revealing gallic (Gaulois) burial sites in central Dijon, central-eastern France.

Celtic group of people perhaps best known for the popular French comic "Astérix and Obélix".

The Gauls first emerged in roughly the fifth century BC, spreading over swathes of modern-day France, Belgium, Switzerland and farther east.

Little is known about their culture beyond the writings of others. These can be biased, such as what was recorded by the Roman emperor Julius Caesar, who conquered the Gauls in 50 BC.

- Prize or punishment? -

Including earlier discoveries in 1992, around 20 tombs with sitting Gauls have been discovered in a small

area of Dijon's city centre.

That is more than a quarter of the 75 tombs featuring sitting Gauls identified worldwide. Other sites have been found in France, Switzerland and the UK.

Regis Labeaune, a researcher at the French archaeological institute INRAP, said the latest bodies were "particularly impressive discoveries".

"Given the number and quality of these discoveries, we can say there was a significant Gallic settlement in Dijon," he told AFP.

However there is much that remains unknown. Was this bizarre burial a punishment for people who had done wrong or a prize for the powerful?

Could these people have been sacrificed to their gods in hopes of a better harvest? Or buried by enemy soldiers to discourage other Gauls from fighting?

Another mystery is whether they were buried alive.

Five of the bodies show signs of violence, including one which has a fatal wound to its skull.

Except for one armband which dates the settlement to the Gallic period, no personal belongings or ornaments were found among the Dijon bodies.

There were all men, measuring between 1.62-1.82 metres tall, except for a child discovered in 1992.

Their teeth were very well-

preserved over the years, "probably because they did not know about sugar," INRAP archaeo-anthropologist Annamaria Latron said.

"Their bones display traces of osteoarthritis, suggesting intense physical activity," particularly in their legs, she said.

- 'A very frustrating profession' -

So why were they buried in this bizarre way?

"We do not have a preferred hypothesis," Latron emphasised.

"We're missing the surface layer, which was above the tombs," she said.

"Being an archaeologist can be a very frustrating profession," she added with a smile.

The bodies of 28 dogs, five sheep and two pigs were found near the site in the 1990s. The carcasses appear to date from the late Gallic period and "seem to correspond to sacrificial practices," according to INRAP.

There are still remnants of the Gauls in the modern French language, including the words for country and paganism, INRAP president Dominique Garcia pointed out.

He called for more attention to be paid to the Gauls, given that two-thirds of France's "prefectures have Gallic origins, according to archaeology".

Tokyo's dazzling cherry blossom season officially begins



Flowering cherry blossoms and buds from a sample cherry tree, Somei Yoshino species, for phenological observation conducted by the Tokyo Regional Headquarters of the Japan Meteorological Agency, are seen at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on March 19, 2026.

Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo's meteorologists declared the start of the much-loved cherry blossom season in the Japanese capital on Thursday, as residents prepare to host outdoor picnics under dazzling floral displays.

The cherry season for Tokyo starts when the official sample tree at Yasukuni Shrine opens at least five flowers.

"Today, the blooming of the Somei Yoshino cherry blossoms was observed," the Tokyo Regional Headquarters of the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said in an eagerly-awaited statement, referring to the most common cherry variety.

Since early Thursday morning, local broadcasters had repeatedly shown dozens of open flowers on the tree. To make it official, a duo of suit-clad officials from the

weather agency stepped in front of dozens of spectators and theatrically counted and pointed to open flowers.

Then they carefully walked around the tree for a closer look and consulted among themselves in front of national media and spectators.

After a few minutes, one of them said they had found 61 open flowers.

"Tokyo's cherry trees came into bloom," he told the crowd, prompting applause.

The JMA said the blooming was five days earlier than the average, March 24, which was last year's arrival date.

The early blooming came as Tokyo experienced warmer-than-usual weather since mid-February, a weather agency official told AFP.

The Lionfish and its threat to our marine wild life



(Oranjestad)—Despite its colorful and striking appearance, the lionfish has become a Caribbean-wide problem for Atlantic sea life. The Aruban marine wild life is also affected by this beautiful dilemma, as it is foreign to our waters and has become a danger to our local fish and reefs.

Originating from the Indo-Pacific Ocean, the lionfish is a relatively small fish. It has no teeth, but it does protect itself against predators using its sharp, colorful spikes. It is said that the sting of a lionfish can be up to 100 times more painful than that of a bee's sting.

Its natural predators in the Indo-Pacific are sharks and barracudas, but in the Caribbean Sea, local fish do not recognize the lionfish as part of their diet. In other words, the lionfish has no predators in the Caribbean Sea. And this becomes a major problem for our local marine life; if there are no predators to stimulate population control of lionfish, these fish can continue to reproduce and expand to other parts of the Atlantic, become more invasive and dangerous for other types of fish.

For Aruba, the lionfish is a

problem especially for our local coral reefs. According to Patrick van Brakel, lionfish expert and hunter from the Hunting Lionfish Aruba foundation, every reef has a "cleaning station"—tiny fish that eat algae and other types of waste on a reef, thus maintaining the reef's health and providing food to the fish population in the area. However, as the lionfish feeds off of these tiny fish, it becomes harder for the coral reef to maintain its health.

Patrick also shares the origins of lionfish in the Caribbean Sea. It is theorized

that the introduction of these fish in the Atlantic happened in Florida, where people would buy lionfish from across the world to keep in their aquariums. However, lionfish grow, and as these buyers realized that the fish were too much upkeep, they were let out into the ocean to roam free. From continental USA, the lionfish travelled to and invaded the entire Caribbean area, from Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao up to New York. In Aruba, lionfish were discovered in 2009.

Controlling the lionfish population is challenge, as

each female fish can lay up to 40,000 eggs a day. Luckily, we have people like van Brakel who dedicate their lives hunting and capturing these invasive species, using them for consumption and jewelry making.

They are caught with a hand spear, an object resembling a garbage picker with 4 sharp prongs. These spears are used like a sling shot to catch lionfish from a distance. These fish are then put into a collecting tube and taken out of the water. This way, he does his part in protecting the local wild life. □



ORANJESTAD — Want to taste something different for a change? How about some Aruban snacks that you can find all around the island? Hop in your car, and go to these locations to find some of the most popular and tasty snacks that are beloved by our locals.

One of the staples of Aruban cuisine and snacks is

the Pastechi. Pastechi is a Caribbean fried pastry that is filled with cheese, meat, chicken, veggies and sometimes even fish! Or perhaps you might want to try a croquette, locally called a "kroket," which is a crusty fried snack with typically a meat and dough mix filling. The Aruban kroket is based on its Dutch counterpart, the "bitterbal".

Aruban snacks and where to find them

These two snacks are typically found in all local snack trucks, which can be found all over the island, including on the side of the main road that stretches from San Nicolas to the Hotel Area. You can also find them at local bakeries all over the island. These places may also sell other snacks and sandwiches too, perfect for on-the-road lunch break.

While you're at it, why not accompany your snack with a refreshing "batido"? Batidos are fruit shakes, typically made with added milk for some creaminess. However, you can also ask to hold the milk. Batidos are commonly found in snack shops too.

You may find some batidos along the flea market downtown.

If you are looking for something a bit more fresh and healthy, why not try some coconuts, or shaved ice from local vendors? These vendors carry their little shop at the back of their truck, so they are ever-moving around the island. However, there are a few spots where you can almost always find a coconut/shaved ice vendor:

- Right next to the Red Anchor in San Nicolas, on the way to Baby Beach.
- Along the main road next to the airport field.
- At the California Light House.
- At the Alto Vista Cha-

pel.

These vendors may also sell other delights, like the beloved coconut-based dessert "cocada" or peanuts. All in all, in Aruba, you can always find some place to take a break and have a bite of something local, you maybe just might have to look for them! □

Photo credit: wheninaruba.com



Aruba: The island of Aloes



ORANJESTAD – Aloe Vera, a succulent plant species, is renowned for its incredible properties for the skin. It is widely distributed and usually grows in tropical, semi-tropical and arid climates on the planet. But this plant also had a very prominent role in the history of Aruba, and its significance to the island's economy endures to this day.

The leaves of Aloe Vera contain a good amount of gel which when used topically, is great for the skin. Traditionally, Arubans use this gel to treat minor burns

and other skin ailments, or just to keep skin supple and looking bright and nourished. Aside from the gel, aloe contains a bitter, yellow substance (called aloin) which is a gentle but powerful laxative, and it is also the origin of the industry of aloe in Aruba.

Aloe vera was introduced in Aruba around 1840, when most of the island's inhabitants were farmers of little means. Dutch Governor Van Raders introduced the plant after it had been introduced in other islands of the Caribbean to culti-

vate and harvest the aloe to produce the laxative.

Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes."

Under Commander Jan Helenus Ferguson (1866-1871), aloe experienced a boom, which is why there is a road named after him, which goes through the aloe fields. In the 19th century, Aruba was the main supplier of aloin for laxative, which was imported abroad to the United States and Europe. The aloin from Aruba and Curaçao was known to be one of the best in the world and was more expensive, which meant that at the time, it had significant economic impact, particularly for the local farmers.

However, by the time the oil industry arrived on Aruba, it changed the labor market on Aruba, shifting away from agriculture. It would be after World War II that aloe would make a comeback. And eventu-



ally, as science learned about the amazing properties of aloe gel, the industry shifted from producing laxative to producing skin care. An interesting fact is that in 1951, the production of Aruban aloe amounted to around 30 percent of the total global production!

The impact and relevance of aloe is visible all around Aruba. While most homes will have a few plants for personal use and decora-

tion, houses are also decorated with aloe motifs, and at some point, aloe even featured on post stamps. Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes." And in 1955, the aloe became a part of Aruba's coat of arms, symbolizing prosperity for the island. □

Images from the archive of the National Library of Aruba.

Aruba's first Ombudsman and what she can mean for you



(Oranjestad)—Ombudsman Mrs. Jurima Bryson, appointed on October 1st 2024, is proud to represent Aruba and is prepared to help both locals and tourists with their concerns.

What is the role of the Ombudsman?

In a nutshell, the Ombudsman is the middle man between you and government or semi-government agencies. This means that as a local or as a visitor of Aruba, you can file a complaint to the bureau of the Ombudsman against government and semi-government agencies. Already left the island? No problem. The Ombudsman of Aruba can still receive and handle your complaint even from

abroad. You only have to provide a way for them to reach you.

To contact the Ombudsman, you can visit the office located at Caya G.F. Betico Croes 149, Oranjestad, Aruba. You can also call at +297 281 6800 or email @ombudsman.aw. for more questions or complaints.

Opening hours

The Ombudsman office is open to the public with no appointment from Monday to Friday from 8:30 to 11:30 am.

Follow the ombudsman on Instagram: @ombudsmanaruba and Facebook: Ombudsman Aruba □

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Alto Vista chapel and its link to Aruba's origins

According to Etnia Nativa, in the 18th century most of the inhabitants of Aruba were indigenous who lived on the north coast, one of the largest communities lived in Alto Vista.

As they were very religious, they had a chief with the name of Antonio Silvester who guided them in the Christian life and it was he who decided to build a stone chapel with a roof of corn rods, which would serve as a place of prayer. In 1750 it was blessed by Father Algemesi who came from Coro-Venezuela and appointed Domingo Antonio Silvester as the island's first prosecutor in the name of the Spanish crown and Rome. In 1752 the prosecution passed into the hands of Antonio Silvester's son-in-law, Miguel Álvarez, who continued to guide the parishioners in their prayers.

According to the book, The History of Alto Vista by R.H. Nooyen, it is not known when Domingo Antonio Silvester came to Aruba from Venezuela. The elders believe Antonio was a Spaniard. In 1780, father Joseph Antonio de la Vegal called Bernardino Silvester, one of Antonio's sons with his wife Anna Cathalina Tromp, "neighbors and naturals of the island Aruba" and thus they became natives.

At the end of the eighteen century many inhabitants the island died as a result of the black fever epidemic and since people believed that the Alto Vista area was the most infected, they began to build their homes further south within the Noord area, so the town of Noord began to grow into a community till getting its own Church. However religious festivals continued to be celebrated at this sacred

native place, with the custom of arriving in procession to Alto Vista.

Two-hundred years after the beautiful time of Alto Vista, people can no longer see much of the town of Alto Vista from 1750. With a lot of work they found the old foundations of the Church of the Queen of the Holy Rosary to build a new chapel on the same place. The entire surrounding area was empty and desolated, making it hard to imagine that Alto Vista was a town at all. A hundred years later, people can see the remains of around twenty houses, some made of stone and others of clay. Nowadays, only around six of these houses remain.

South of the chapel in the yard two graves can be observed, there was the cemetery which father Pablo de Algemesi blessed. It is not



certain, but it is believed that the two graves belong to Antonio Silvester and Miguel Alvares, according to Nooyen. About 50 meters near the chapel there are still the markings of an old house, where Antonio and Bernardino Silvester would have lived. About 200 meters from the chapel there is a water tank which the locals call Tanki Cacique. In the past this tank was closed. But mostly water was brought out from

the Poz di Noord, a well dug in the sand.

The chapel can be viewed from basically any point in the north side, even from Paradera and Sero Plat. All the historical remains around the chapel provide us with an idea on how the old people of Alto Vista used to live. Don't miss the opportunity to visit a place of historical significance with a window to Aruba's past. □

Enjoy one of the best views on Aruba at the top of the Hooiberg Hill



(Oranjestad)—If you are a regular hiker, or maybe want to spice up your morning work out session, then you might enjoy one of the most popular climbing sites on the island: The Hooiberg Hill. Accompanied with a 600-step staircase, this hill overlooks a great part of the island, the Caribbean sea, and sometimes even the Santa Anna mountain located in the coastal state of Falcon in Venezuela, providing one of the best views you can get on Aruba.

located at the center district of the island, Santa Cruz, the Hooiberg Hill is the second highest point on the island at 165 meters above sea level (or about 540 feet above sea level). The highest point is Jamanota Hill at 189 meters (620 feet), located in the Arikok National Park.

The staircase that run on the side of the hill was first built in 1951, when Mr. Eduardo Tromp constructed it. At that time, the staircase consisted of 900 steps. Over time, as the steps faced erosion, the government decided to renovate these stairs in 1991. This new project delivered the newer staircase with only 587 steps. However, don't be fooled—it may still be a work out to get on top. In addition, there is now a gazebo placed halfway up the stair for a little rest. The view at this resting stop is also a sight to see.

The best time to climb the hill would be early in the morning or right before sunset, as it may not be as hot. However, the hill is of course open all day, every day. □

Visit the island's popular cave sites!



(Oranjestad)—Among the endless sea of dark brown sand and cacti, there are two caves hidden in the outskirts of San Nicolas, in the north-eastern area of the island. These caves, The Quadirikiri cave and The Fontein Cave are open to visitors of the Arikok National Park, so if you ever decide to take an “off-road” tour in the park, be sure to visit these prehistoric caves.

Quadirikiri Cave

Known for its two chambers accompanied by a skylight, the Quadirikiri Cave is the most popular cave among locals and tourists, as it is easy to walk through and provides great lighting for pictures.

Woman in Quadirikiri Cave, Arikok National Park, Aruba
As with all prehistoric or ancient

that adds to the lore and mystery of the site. The Quadirikiri cave is no different. The most well-known legend behind the cave could be considered as Aruba's first love story, as it tells the tale of the undying love between the chief's daughter and her beloved. As legend would have it, the chief disapproved of his daughter's choice of lover, as he thought him unworthy. Stubborn and filled with anger, the daughter refused to turn away her beloved.

So, the chief decided to lock her up in the Quadirikiri Cave, in hopes that she would soon calm down and turn away her lover. Her beloved, in turn, was locked away in the Tunnel of Love (Now known as the Huliba Cave).

Through the pathways underneath the Tunnel of Love running up to the Quadirikiri cave, the two love birds found each other, and refused to let each other go. Because of their stubbornness, they both died in the Quadirikiri Cave, their ascending spirits burning two holes in the ceiling of the cave. This is why the cave has two holes through which sunlight passes through to illuminate the chamber.

Though there have been discoveries of Amerindian drawing on the wall, these have mostly been ruined by vandalism. However, the Fontein Cave further up north, provides a better glimpse in prehistoric Amerindian paintings.

Fontein Cave

Longer than the Quadirikiri Cave, the Fontein Cave contains pathways that stretch to the limestone walls further down. Here is also where prehistoric drawings can be seen. Though this cave does not have its own legend, this was speculated to have been occupied—or at least used by prehistoric Arawak settlers on the island for rituals and other spiritual ceremonies.

The Huliba Cave/ Tunnel of Love

The Huliba Cave, formerly known as the Tunnel of Love, was once open to the public, and was the biggest and most accessible of all three caves. This cave had five chambers, including one that is heart-shaped. This cave had narrow stairs that led to long pathways deep into the cave, with a staircase leading to the exit on the other side. In one of the chambers, there used to be the carving of the Virgin Mary, put there for the protection of the cave.

However, the Huliba Cave has been permanently closed for a few years now, as a way to preserve the bat population that lives in the cave. These Long Tongue Fruit Bats and Insect Eater Bats are very important to the ecosystem of the island. Though this cave is no longer accessible to the public, it surely is interesting to learn more about the history of these caves and the Arawak tribes that resided or utilized them.

Do note that these caves are very dark, humid, hot, and are inhabited by bats. Do wear comfortable clothing and shoes, as the pathways in these caves may be rough and bumpy. Take care to not disturb the bats' habitat. □



Keeping up with the conniving spider... Nanzi fools Cha Tiger

Many years ago, Cha* Tiger did not live in the mondi*, but among civil society. Back then, he was feared by everyone. When he walked past in a halfway, everyone around would make room immediately, that's how ferocious he was.

One night a group of friends was hanging out and they were talking about Cha Tiger. "You know, that tiger sure is incredibly strong and I don't trust him one bit. He probably eats a lot too. Oh, I'm so scared of him!" one person said.

"Oh, don't be stupid! What can Cha Tiger do? He's all bark and no bite, that's it. I certainly am not afraid of him. I bet you guys that I could even sit on his back like I would any donkey." It was Nanzi who said this. The people around him laughed at his remarks, thinking how silly it was for him to say such things.

"You, Nanzi? You are such a liar! He'll stomp you into next Tuesday, stop saying such nonsense."

"I'm not lying!" Nanzi defended himself. "He'll take me all the way to Shon Arei*."

The next morning, Shon Arei already knew of what Nanzi had been saying about Cha Tiger. He was really curious to see if Nanzi was brave enough to put his money where his mouth is. Cha Tiger walked past.

"Hey, Cha Tiger!" someone called to him. He growled at the person. "Hey, Cha Tiger! Listen!"

"Nanzi made fun of you, said he wasn't afraid of you at all! Said he could sit on your back and that you weren't as strong as we think you are."

Cha Tiger stopped dead in his tracks, furious. "Well, I'll set him straight!" Cha Tiger ran toward Nanzi's house, prepared to teach Nanzi a painful lesson. The entire way there he was growling and yelling, making everyone around aware what was going to happen. They all ran inside and peaked through the blinds to see the fight that was going to unfold.

Nanzi also heard Cha Tiger's screams, slowly getting closer and closer. He was terrified. His face turned pale, and his teeth started chattering like someone with a high fever. Sweat was dripping down his forehead.

When Cha Tiger arrived at Nanzi's place, he stormed in and saw Nanzi's frail body lying face down in the corner. "Hey, how are you, Cha Tiger?" Nanzi asked, his voice trembling. "I Heard you were making fun of me in front of your little friends, so I came to hear from your own mouth what you have to say to me," Cha Tiger retorted, still fuming.

"Me? Talk bad about you?" Nanzi chuckled nervously. "People are such liars, I swear. Can't you see how sick I am here?" Nanzi took a pause, like someone who couldn't breathe properly. In his case of course, it was probably from extreme fear. "Shi Maria* wanted to take me to Shon Arei, where someone can heal me from my illness." Still wrapped up in his act,



Nanzi turned back face down. "Me, a father of nine little children..."

Cha Tiger was shocked. Nanzi looked absolutely terrible, God knows he was dying.

"Cha Tiger, you're strong. Could you put me on your back and take me to Shon Arei, I can barely walk," Nanzi pleaded. Cha Tiger took pity on the spider and agreed to do this favor. Nanzi climbed on the tiger's back, letting his body fall down and grabbing on to Cha Tiger's neck. "Would you mind putting a rope in your mouth so I can hold on? That way I can sit up straight," Nanzi asked. Cha Tiger growled in reluctance but said OK. And so they made their way to Shon Arei.

Once they started traveling through the mondi, Nanzi turned to Cha Tiger and said: "These mosquitos are so annoying! Cha Tiger, do you mind if I cut a piece of branch so I can keep these mosquitos away?" Cha Tiger let him take his branch.

Eventually they made it out the mondi to where everyone else was. Nanzi immediately perked up and whacked Cha Tiger with his branch, making the tiger jump. He ran all the way to Shon Arei's castle. Exhaust-

ed, he plumped down in front of His Majesty.

"See, Shon Arei? Cha Tiger ain't nothing but a big donkey!" Nanzi said proudly. Everyone around cheered: "Hurray, Nanzi!" Poor Cha Tiger was so embarrassed that he was fooled by the conniving spider, and so he ran into the mondi to hide. To this day, it's said that the tiger still hides away in the mondi.

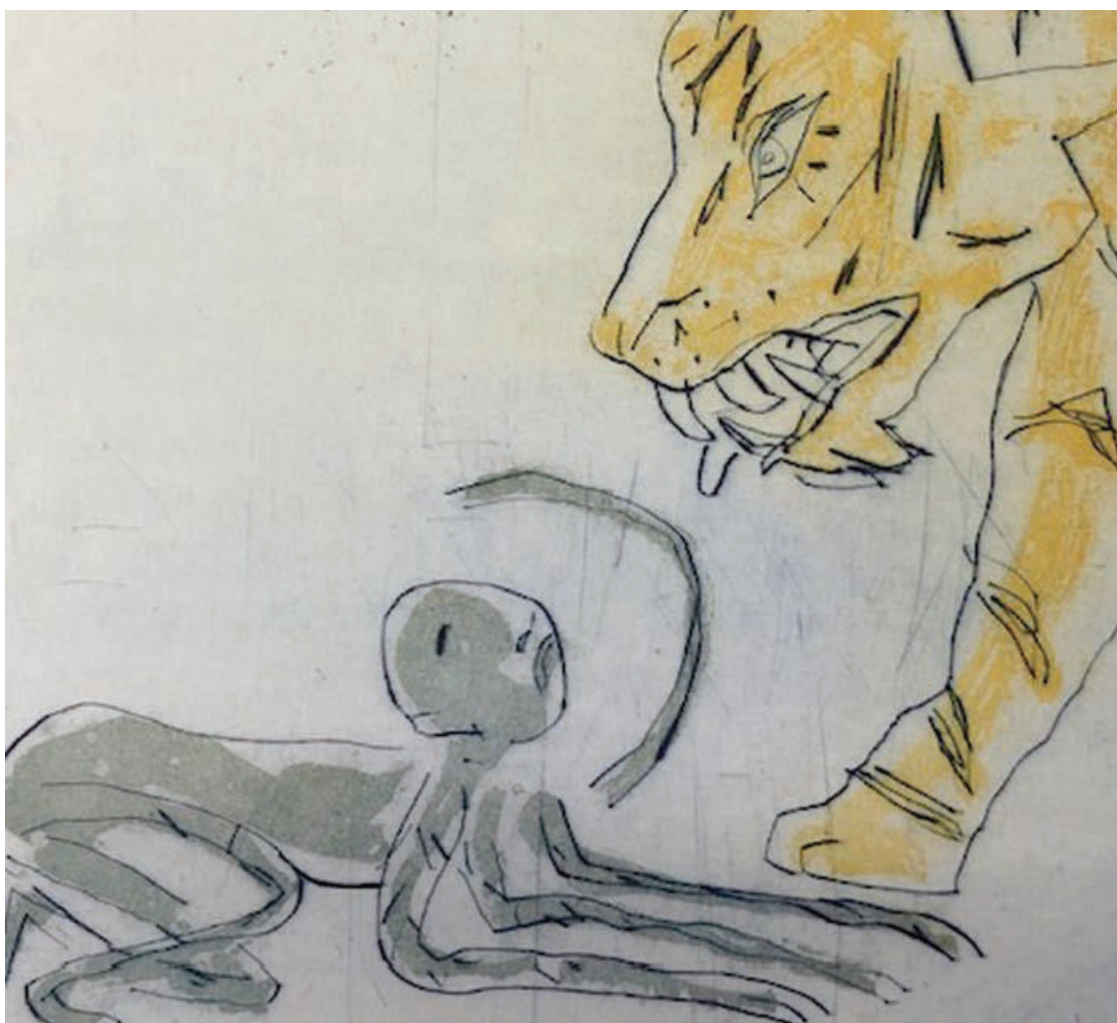
Cha: Nickname placed in front of someone's name and can mean anything, like friend. However, it often has negative connotations first.

Mondi: dry wooded areas found on the ABC islands.

Shon Arei: The King

Shi Maria: Nanzi's wife. □

Story and pictures are from "Kon Nanzi a Nek Shon Arei (i otro kuentanan antiano di e araña sabi)" by Nilda Pinto.



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By THOMAS JOSEPH

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1 Moses of the track
6 Story with a point

DOWN 1 Snaky
11 Long attack
12 Close, as a port

13 Elite Navy group
14 Thou
15 Learning method

17 Metal sources
18 To boot
20 Spiders' creations

22 Pay stub line
23 Sailing event
26 Western resort lake

28 Different
29 Genus sub-division
31 Avenue tree

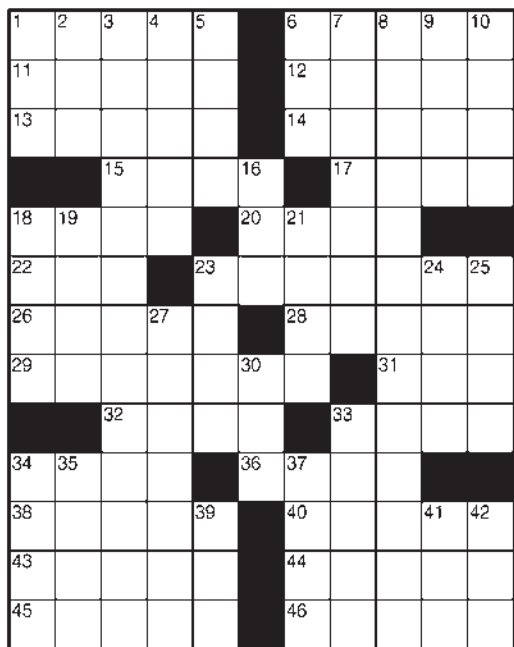
32 Euro division
33 With skill
34 Rooney of "Carol"

36 Cain's brother
38 Unaccompanied
40 Japanese port

43 Namely
44 Half of humanity

SORE ASCOTS
WHIR SHANIA
INGE HERESY
MOONBEAM
LOU RELIC
CREWS SNORE
POT HAN
LOTS SA SCENT
SKOAL URN
LAS VEGAS
CAPONE ARGO
ATOMIC TIED
NEWEST ENDS

18 Hill builders
19 Spring
21 They may clash
23 Horse halter
24 Spill the beans
25 Base group
27 Maritime
30 Seventh letter
33 Man of morals
34 School subject
35 Balm ingredient
37 Gift toppers
39 Simone's season
41 Film-maker Burns
42 What's more



3-31

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-31 CRYPTOQUOTE

GEBCQYX OC'DD UMTQ MP, PNC

KYMTAEO VETTCVPMET, PNC

DESCKG, PNC QKCYBCKG YTQ

BC. — JCKBMP PNC UKEL

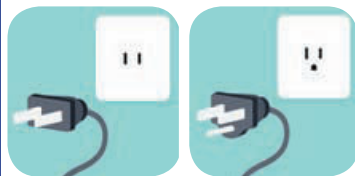
Cryptoquote: WOULD SOMEONE PLEASE GET THIS BIG WALKING CARPET OUT OF MY WAY? — PRINCESS LEIA, "STAR WARS"

Cruise ship Schedule: March 16 - 22 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
MON	16	VALIANT LADY	09.00	22.00	C	1
TUE	17	CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
WED	18	ROTTERDAM	08.00	17.00	B	1
		BRILLIANCE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1
THU	19	MSC DIVINA	08.00	18.00	B	1
		AZAMARA QUEST	09.30	22.00	C	1
FRI	20	CARIBBEAN PRINCESS	09.00	22.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN STAR	11.00	20.00	C	1
SUN	22	CELEBRITY ASCENT	09.00	23.00	C	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★★★

3/20

Answer to previous puzzle

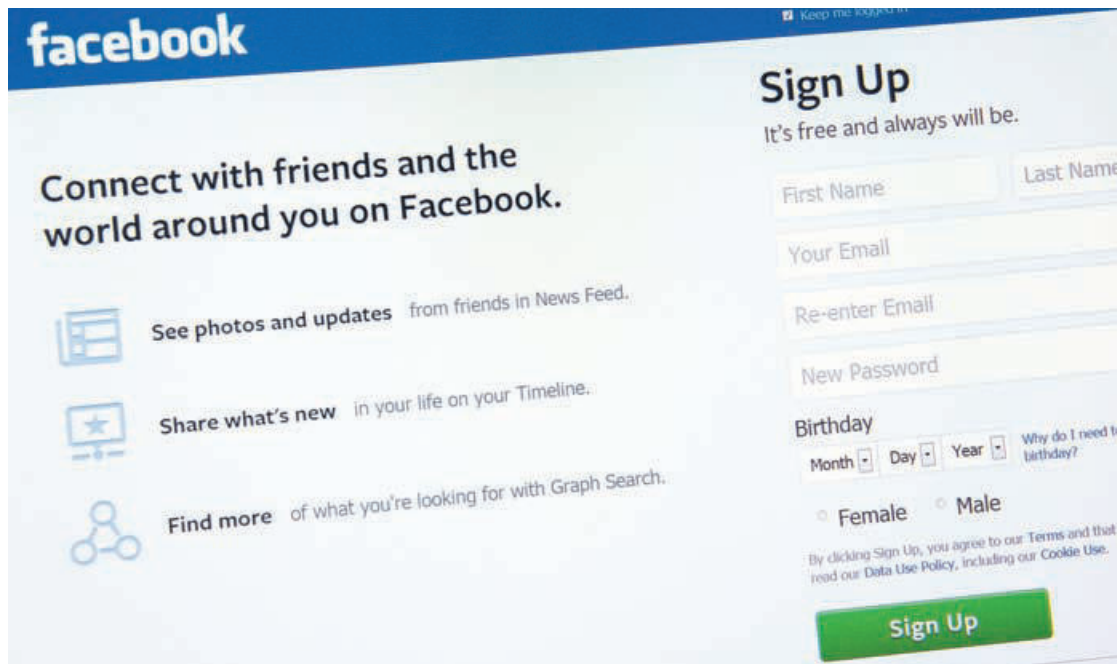
8	7	6	4	1	5	3	2	9
4	9	2	3	6	8	1	7	5
1	5	3	9	7	2	6	8	4
3	6	1	2	8	4	5	9	7
9	8	5	6	3	7	2	4	1
7	2	4	1	5	9	8	3	6
5	4	8	7	2	6	9	1	3
2	1	7	5	9	3	4	6	8
6	3	9	8	4	1	7	5	2

Difficulty: ★★★

3/19

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Social media impacts youth wellbeing: U.N. happiness report



This January 30, 2014 photo taken in Washington, DC, shows the splash page for the social media internet site Facebook.

Helsinki, Finland

Heavy social media use is undermining youth wellbeing in many countries, according to a UN-sponsored report published Thursday that put Finland at the top of its "happiness" index for the ninth year running. This year's World Happiness Report highlighted the impact of social media as many countries impose or mull legislative restrictions on social media use for young people. "Dramatic declines" in happiness were recorded among under 25s in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and "especially among girls", the report said.

By contrast, young people in other parts of the world felt better about their lives. "Most of the world's young people are happier today than they were 20 years ago, and that's a trend that deserves attention," Jon Clifton, chief executive of Gallup which contributed to the report, said in a statement. Social media has a "complex" affect on wellbeing, the report noted. Impacting factors included time spent on social media sites, the type of platform, how it was used, as well as demographic factors such as gender and socio-economic status.

"Heavy usage is associated with much lower wellbeing, but those deliberately off social media also appear to be missing out on some positive effects," said Jan-Emmanuel De Neve, one of the report's editors and an economics professor at Oxford University and director of its Well-being Research Centre. Among 147 countries listed, the lowest levels of life satisfaction were reported from war-torn Afghanistan, where Taliban rulers, who returned to power in 2021, have been accused of human rights violations and mistreatment of women. Based on a three-year average, the happiness index

considers six factors: GDP per capita, life expectancy, social support, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption.

Nordic nations continue to dominate the rankings, with Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway joining Finland in taking five of the top six spots this year. Costa Rica ranked fourth, entering the top five for the first time and the highest ranking ever for a Latin American country.

- 'Pristine nature' -

Finland kept its top position with a score of 7.764 on a 10-point scale.

Juho Saari, a social and

healthcare policy professor at Tampere University, noted that Finland had challenges with record high unemployment and large cuts of social and welfare benefits but said "despite of all this, we are still the happiest country in the world".

"It tells us that politics do not matter that much," he added, explaining that people's private lives were more important in determining happiness.

Known for its thousands of lakes, sauna culture and extensive welfare system, the country's 5.6 million inhabitants generally report a high level of trust in authorities and low levels of inequality.

"We have pristine nature, and the peace and quiet here is probably our trump card for why it's nice to be here," said 30-year-old Karolina Iissalo who spent her birthday at a public sauna in downtown Helsinki.



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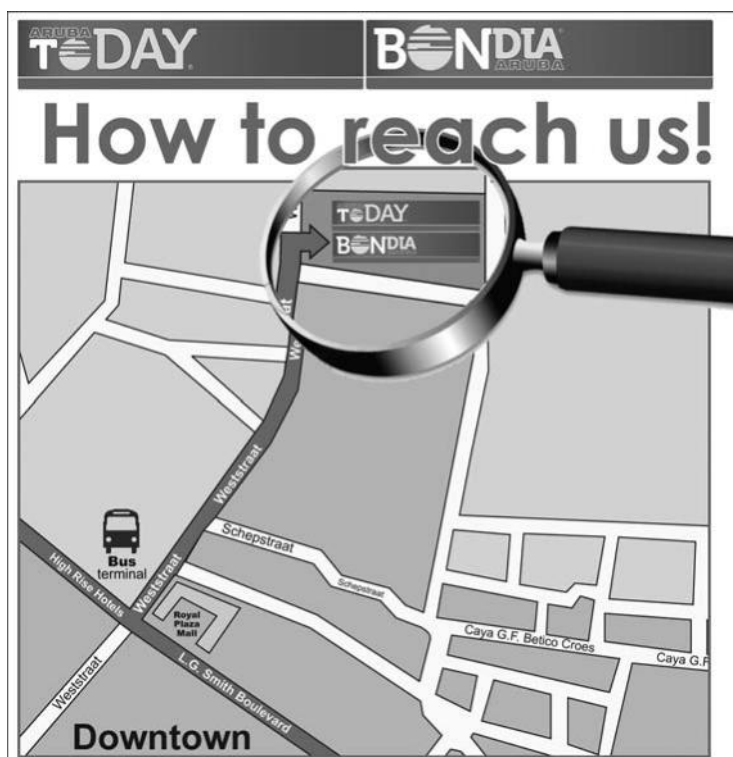
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Russian ballet banned for 'gay propaganda' gets new life in Berlin

Berlin, Germany

A ballet about the life of legendary Soviet-born dancer Rudolf Nureyev that was banned in Russia for containing "gay propaganda" will get a new lease of life in Berlin this week.

"Nureyev", created by Russian film and stage director Kirill Serebrennikov, premiered in Moscow in 2017, but after Russia tightened its anti-LGBTQ laws, the ballet was banned in 2023 due to its open portrayal of same-sex relationships.

Serebrennikov, who left Russia in 2022 and now lives in exile in Germany, will present the ballet for the first time outside his home country at the Berlin State Ballet on March 21, with former Bolshoi dancer David Soares in the title role.

Bringing the ballet back to life is "very special to my heart and a big responsibility", said Brazilian dancer Soares, 28, who also left Moscow in 2022 after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"Nureyev" tells the story of the man widely regarded as the leading male ballet dancer of the 20th century, who fled the Soviet Union for France in 1961 and died there in 1993 due to complications from AIDS.

Christian Spuck, the direc-



Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov poses at the Deutsche Oper opera house in Berlin on January 28, 2026, during an interview with AFP.

tor of the Berlin State Ballet, has insisted on keeping the production as close to the original as possible, Serebrennikov said.

The message for Western audiences is "the same" as that intended for Russia, Serebrennikov told AFP, "because we are living in a time of lack of freedom, lack of common sense".

- High heels and drag -

With his "disruptive art" and "rebel mood", Nureyev is someone "who doesn't belong to any time", Serebrennikov said.

"He is kind of above every-

thing. That's why this figure... will be always a magnet for other artists and will be a big example how to fight against the boring grey normality," he said.

The ballet highlights Nureyev's relationships with men and his enjoyment of the gay scene in Paris, where he is shown surrounded by dancers in high heels and drag.

When it premiered at the Bolshoi in December 2017, "Nureyev" was well received by critics.

But Serebrennikov himself was unable to attend, as he was under house arrest

on allegations of stealing state funds.

The premiere had initially been scheduled for July 2017, but was cancelled after Russian officials objected to the male nudity visible onstage.

The show was supposed to feature a large, full-stage backdrop of a completely nude photograph of Nureyev taken by the famous photographer Richard Avedon, removed for the eventual premiere later that year.

In Berlin, the image will be reinstated in all its glory.

- 'Extreme expressions' -

Serebrennikov, 56, is one of tens of thousands of Russians who have fled to Berlin since 2022, the year the Ukraine war broke out, making the city the unofficial capital of the Russian opposition.

The director has gathered a team of fellow exiles around him for the new production, including choreographer Yuri Possokhov. For Soares, who left Brazil at the age of 12 to fulfil his dream of dancing in Moscow, it is "quite impossible" to fully embody Nureyev.

"He is not just a ballet star. He is a character, a very, very powerful person," said the dancer, who immersed himself in interviews with Nureyev and others close to him in preparation for the role.

Soares, who will share the role of Nureyev with several other soloists during the production run, lauds the dancer's unique style, characterised by "explosive jumps", "extreme expressions" and "artistic freedom in every sense".

"He was one of those artists who teach the audience how to see ballet in a new way," he said.

"When he came with his way of dancing, he taught the audience, sit and watch what I do." □

Labubu creators hope for monster film hit in Sony co-production

Beijing, China

China's snaggle-toothed Labubu dolls will soon come alive on the big screen after flying off the toy shelves, with maker Pop Mart announcing a collaboration with Sony Pictures.

The movie, which is still in early development, will feature the fanged plushie monsters in a "live-action and CGI hybrid", Beijing-based Pop Mart said on Thursday.

Created in 2015 by Hong Kong artist Kasing Lung, Labubus sparked a craze nine years later, with the "ugly-cute" charms adorning the handbags of celebrities such as Rihanna and Dua Lipa and sparking massive queues at Pop

Mart stores around the world.

Vivian Jia, a Canadian tourist visiting Pop Mart's flagship Shanghai flagship store, said she was looking forward to watching

the Labubu movie with her children. "I think they're so cute, especially the ones with the eyes that move... my friends' kids all like (Labubus) too," she told AFP. Jia said she spent more than 400 yuan (\$58)

on a Labubu figure, which she said she planned to display in her living room in Vancouver.

The new film project, unveiled by Lung and director Paul King ("Wonka" and "Paddington") in Paris on Thursday, will seek to capitalise on the dolls' viral fame by bringing "Labubu's whimsical world to the big screen", Pop Mart said.

- 'Cool' China -

The collectable dolls, which typically sell for around \$40, are released in limited quantities and sold in "blind boxes", meaning buyers do not know the exact model they will receive. Some of the less common Labubu figures can fetch thousands of

dollars.

Pop Mart sold more than 100 million Labubu dolls worldwide last year, with Chinese officials hailing the toothy characters' popularity as evidence of China's growing cultural and soft power.

They have become furry ambassadors for a "cool" China, even in places such as Europe and North America, where public opinion towards Beijing has not always been positive.

Camilla Pinheiro, a Brazilian Pop Mart fan who bought several dolls at the Shanghai store, said she would prefer a movie franchise about some of Pop Mart's less well-known toy lines, such as the punk-inspired Peach Riot figures. □



The Friends-giving in POP CITY float by POP MART, featuring Labubu characters is seen during the inflation of Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloons on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, outside the American Museum of Natural History, on the eve of the parade in New York City, on November 26, 2025.

Doncic and James power Lakers over Rockets as win streak hits seven

New York, United States

Luka Doncic scored 40 points and LeBron James added 30 on Wednesday to spark the Los Angeles Lakers over Houston 124-116, stretching their NBA win streak to seven games. Doncic, the league's leading scorer, added 10 assists and nine rebounds while 41-year-old James hit 13-of-14 shots from the floor for the visiting Lakers.

"He pulled it out with big shots, big time," James said, heaping praise on Slovenian Doncic.

"He has been doing it all year for us and he has been in great rhythm since the season started and we just try to pick him up."

James, the all-time NBA scoring leader, delivered a masterful performance.

"I didn't feel that great when I woke up or even when I got to the arena. I was pretty tired from the last game," James said.

"But once the competitive juices get going, we got it flowing and we just tried to make a few plays."

The Lakers (44-25), third in the Western Conference, took the season series tie-



Luka Doncic #77 of the Los Angeles Lakers drives to the basket against Amen Thompson #1 of the Houston Rockets during the game at Toyota Center on March 18, 2026 in Houston, Texas.

breaker over Houston (41-27).

Doncic and James each scored 18 points in the first half as the Lakers led 67-55 at halftime.

James made four first-half dunks, his most since 2020, and went 8-for-8 from the floor to match his most baskets without a missed shot in any half since March 2011. But the Rockets rallied in the third quarter as Kevin

Durant, who had only two first-half points, scored 13 in the third and Houston led 92-89 entering the fourth.

Doncic sandwiched three-pointers around lobs for dunks to James and Rui Hachimura for a 120-111 lead and Houston could not rally.

"We have a lot of resilience," James said. "Even when we went down in the

second half, they made a run and took the lead. But we have guys who have been in big games before." At Boston, Jaylen Brown scored 32 points and Jayson Tatum added 24 points and a game-high 10 rebounds as the Celtics (46-23) ripped visiting Golden State 120-99.

Brown shot 8-of-9 from the floor to score 19 points in the first quarter while Ta-

tum had 16 in the first half, his best half since returning two weeks ago from a 10-month ruptured Achilles tendon absence.

Brown passed Dave Cowens for 10th on the all-time Celtics scoring list.

"It just goes to show the dedication, the commitment that he has made to his craft and getting better every single year," Tatum said of Brown.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 20 points to extend his NBA record streak of 20-point games as the reigning champion Oklahoma City Thunder cruised 121-92 at Brooklyn.

Jared McCain added 26 points off the bench for the Thunder, whose 10th consecutive victory boosted the NBA's best record to 55-15.

The Nets fell to 17-52 with a fifth straight loss.

Oklahoma City led 60-24 at halftime, the Nets matching a club record for fewest points in a first half from the 1997-98 season.

"From the jump we did a great job and it carried over throughout the game," Oklahoma City's Aaron Wiggins said. □

Karalis hits prime form to threaten Duplantis surprise

Torun, Poland

Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis will head into the world indoor championships, which run from Friday to Sunday, confidently eyeing a fourth pole vault title, but there is a rival lurking in the wings potentially capable of springing a surprise.

Emmanouil Karalis cleared 6.17 metres at last month's Greek indoor champs, overtaking Sergey Bubka to go second in the all-time list.

While still some distance short of Duplantis' newly-set world record of 6.31m, Karalis is himself not lacking confidence heading into Saturday's competition in Torun, Poland.

The question is whether the Greek could put a stick in

the spokes of Duplantis' well-oiled machine that has seen the U.S.-born Swede dominate the sport over the last six years.

"I'm dangerous if I'm enjoying myself," grinned Karalis, who had a half-decent attempt at 6.31m at the Greek champs.

Duplantis called the Karalis' succesful 6.17m vault "amazing", adding his immediate reaction to it was "somewhere in the middle of shocked and not shocked".

"He's a huge talent and he's been jumping amazing the past year, year and a half or so, especially.

"But that jump was extra out of the ordinary. It was just really, really flawless and just really, really beautiful, honestly.

"That was very inspiring. And I'd be lying if I said it didn't fire me up a little bit, put some fire under my ass."

- 'Everyone wants to win' -

Karalis said the lines between actual victory and performance satisfaction were sometimes blurred in an event demanding not only exceptional speed, strength and agility, but also a considerable level of technical nous.

"Every athlete that is here wants to win. Everyone that is competing wants to win and win gold," he said. "I also want to win, but still, my main goal is to do the best that I can. If I know I gave everything on that specific day and still wasn't able to win a medal, I'll be



Sweden's Armand Duplantis (R) and Greece's Emmanouil Karalis attend a press conference ahead of the Mondo Classic pole vault competition in gala format at the IFU Arena in Uppsala on March 11, 2026.

satisfied."

Karalis added: "You never know what's going to happen. That's why we're competing, and that's why we have world championships and meetings.

"I'm feeling good. I believe in myself, I believe in my abilities to jump high."

Karalis, who took silver behind Duplantis at the world indoors and outdoors

in 2025, has competed against the double Olympic champion and three-time world outdoor gold medallist in 41 competitions.

Only once has the 26-year-old Greek vaulter come out on top: the 2018 world indoors, where Karalis placed fifth and Duplantis seventh. □



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Messi scores 900th career goal but Miami crash out

Fort Lauderdale, United States

Argentine superstar Lionel Messi bagged the 900th goal of his glittering career on Wednesday but could not prevent Inter Miami from crashing out of the CONCACAF Champions Cup on away goals after a 1-1 draw with Nashville. Messi, 38, scored his milestone goal after just seven minutes to put Miami 1-0 up in the second leg of their last-16 clash in the regional club competition. But Nashville's Cristian Espinoza lashed in a 74th-minute equalizer to make it 1-1 on aggregate, and after holding Miami at bay for the remainder of the game, the visitors from Tennessee advanced to the quarter-finals on the away goals rule.

Miami's exit was a bitter-sweet ending to what had promised to be a night of celebration after Messi's early opener in what was



Lionel Messi #10 of Inter Miami CF shoots during the CONCACAF Champions Cup Round of 16 Second Leg match between Inter Miami CF and Nashville SC at Chase Stadium on March 18, 2026 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

the club's final game at their Chase Stadium home in Fort Lauderdale.

Messi's strike took the Argentine's tally to 81 goals

for the MLS champions following his move to Florida in 2023.

The eight-time Ballon D'Or winner previously scored 672 goals for Spanish giants

Barcelona, 32 for France's Paris Saint-Germain, and a further 115 international goals for Argentina.

Goal number 900 came

some 21 years after Messi's first goal in senior football, when he scored for Barcelona in a 2-0 win over Albacete in 2005 as a fresh-faced 17-year-old. Messi, widely regarded as the greatest player in football history, still has some way to go before he catches his great rival Cristiano Ronaldo, the 41-year-old Portuguese superstar who is on 965 career goals.

Speaking ahead of Messi's 900th goal, Miami manager and former Argentina and Barcelona teammate Javier Mascherano described the star's goals total as "insane."

"I've been lucky enough to see most, or many, of the goals he's scored, much closer than you all, and that's a privilege," Mascherano said.

"The number we're talking about (900) is insane, and that's why Leo is a one of a kind." □